

Understanding and interests in the social sciences.

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Abstract:

Does understanding a theory in the social sciences require having specific epistemic and/or non-epistemic interests? Are some individuals or communities privileged as understanders (because of their particular interests)? Do some understandees miss the particular perspectives required for understanding a specific social theory? Does understanding demand - besides *comprehending* a theory – the recognition and concurrence of interests? Does the idea of *standpoint understanding* make any sense?

Starting from an analysis of the misunderstandings between so-called mainstream economists and heterodox economists, I will try to shine some light on the notoriously vague concept of understanding. This analysis will consider both historical factors (i.e. the history of rational choice theory) as social factors (i.e. social links between the producers, the economists, and the product, economic theories) to get to a philosophical account of understanding in the social sciences, in which I will defend that making the differences qua interests more explicit can help us comprehend why some theories are more easily 'understood' than others.

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